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Beat the Heat: Home Projects You Need to Tackle Before Summer Arrives

If you've ever tried caulking a window frame when it's 95 degrees outside, you already know the answer to "why didn't I do this in May?" The caulk goes on like cold peanut butter, sticks to your fingers, and dries before it's even in the gap. Congratulations, you've now paid for the privilege of doing it again next spring.

Eastern Washington doesn't ease into summer. It shows up like an uninvited houseguest, suddenly, completely, and without mercy. That narrow window between "still muddy" and "surface of the sun" is prime time for knocking out projects that heat makes miserable, dangerous, or just plain ineffective.

Here's what deserves your attention right now.

Your Roof and Attic Are Already Planning Against You

Winter is rough on roofs, and the damage it leaves behind gets dramatically worse once temperatures climb. A small lifted shingle that's losing a little heat right now turns into a full leak the moment afternoon thunderstorms hit in July. Get up there, or pay someone to, and look for lifted edges, cracked sealant around vents and chimneys, and any flashing that's working itself loose.

While you're thinking about the top of your house, check your attic ventilation. An underventilated attic in an Eastern Washington summer can hit 150 degrees, which shortens the life of your shingles from the inside out and turns your upstairs into a place where houseplants go to die. Ridge vents, soffit vents, and attic fans are not glamorous, but neither is replacing a roof ten years early.

Exterior Painting and Caulking Have a Temperature Window

Most exterior paints and caulks have an application range typically between 50 and 90 degrees and Eastern Washington blows right past the top of that range by late June. Apply exterior caulk or paint when it's too hot and you get poor adhesion, bubbling, and cracking within a season or two. The spring window is real and it closes fast.

Walk the perimeter of your home and look at every joint, seam, and gap where materials meet. Where the siding meets the foundation. Around every window and door frame. Anywhere two different materials come together. Caulk is one of the cheapest things you can buy at a hardware store and one of the highest-return investments you can make in your home. A $6 tube now versus a water damage repair bill later is not a close competition.

Get Your Cooling System Looked At Before Everyone Else Does

Every spring, roughly the first week temperatures hit 80, every HVAC company in the region gets slammed with calls from people whose air conditioning decided not to work. Don't be that person sweating through hold music while the technician's next available appointment is three weeks out.

Schedule an AC tune-up now. Change your filters. Clean your condenser coils if you're comfortable doing it, or have a pro do it as part of a service call. These are not complicated things, but they get skipped every year by every homeowner until the system fails on the hottest day of August, which is when it always fails, because that's when it's working hardest.

While you're at it, check that your outdoor condenser unit has clearance. Shrubs, tall grass, and last fall's leaves stacked against the unit make it work harder and wear out faster. Give it two feet of breathing room in every direction.

Irrigation Systems After Winter Are Not Ready to Trust

If you blew out your irrigation system in the fall, and you should have, don't just turn it back on and assume everything is fine. Freeze-thaw cycles crack emitters, shift heads, and occasionally do creative things to pipes that made sense when the ground was frozen but make much less sense now. Run each zone manually and watch what happens. A head that's spraying straight up at full height and soaking your siding is not watering your lawn. It's watering your foundation, which is a different and worse outcome.

Fix these things in April, before the grass has browned out and you're desperately throwing water at everything to compensate for the irrigation zone that was never working right.

Deck and Fence Wood Needs Attention Before UV Does It For You

Wood that goes into summer without a protective finish is wood that's aging in fast-forward. The UV radiation in Eastern Washington summers is intense, and unprotected wood grays, checks, and cracks at a pace that will genuinely surprise you if you've never paid attention to it.

Clean your deck and fence now, let them dry out completely from spring moisture, and apply a quality stain or sealer before the heat arrives. Don't apply it to wet wood, don't apply it in direct sun when it's hot, and don't skip this two years in a row and wonder why the wood looks terrible. Apply to a clean, dry surface on a mild day and you'll add years to the life of the structure.

The Basement and Crawl Space Window

Spring is when water moves, and that means it's the best time to catch where it's going that it shouldn't. Check your crawl space and basement for signs of moisture intrusion: efflorescence (that white chalky residue on concrete), standing water, or vapor barrier damage. Extend your downspout extensions away from the foundation if they're dumping water right next to the house. Make sure your grading still slopes away from the structure rather than toward it.

None of this is exciting. Nobody has ever hosted a dinner party and proudly told guests about their crawl space vapor barrier. But the homeowners who pay attention to this stuff are the ones who don't end up with mold remediation bills that require a second mortgage.

Summer is coming, and it's not patient. Get these done while the weather is still cooperating, and you'll spend the hot months actually enjoying your home instead of working on it in conditions that make you question your life choices.

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AS YOU CLEAN YOUR GUTTERS, REMEMBER THIS!
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High-ROI Outdoor Living Components

Outdoor living has become a coveted feature for many homeowners and those looking to buy. In 2026, landscape architecture has shifted from something that is purely ornamental to features that are functional and resilient. The American Society of Landscape Architects says a professionally designed landscape can increase a home's value by anywhere from 15 to 20 percent. Some projects can yield a return on investment of even more — even recuperating the entire cost.

Where is a homeowner to start when it comes to maximizing the potential of a landscape? These projects and components can be a good place to start.

- Natural stone patios: A high-quality patio can offer a great ROI. These patios may use the same stone levels and lines as the interior of the home.
- Outdoor kitchens: HGTV says an outdoor kitchen ROI can range from 55 percent to 200 percent, depending on the location and comparable homes in the area. High-value versions include built-in grills, weather-resistant cabinetry, and stone prep areas.
- Climate-controlled pergolas: Pergolas on their own can add interest and function to outdoor spaces. Those that feature motorized louvers that adjust for sun and rain have become a luxury essential for many homeowners. They help extend the usability of outdoor spaces during various seasons.
- Smart lighting systems: Integrated systems with LED lights controlled by apps are now major selling points for homes. These systems improve security and curb appeal at night. According to Urban Oasis Contracting, outdoor lighting doesn't just show a space, but also transforms it. Adding carefully placed lights can redefine the property in distinct ways.
- Softscaping improvements: Mature trees can add character to a property and also reduce cooling costs via natural shade. Landscapes that require low irrigation are outperforming traditional lawns, according to Organic Valley.

Homeowners looking to get great returns on outdoor living investments can consider prized improvements that transform exterior living spaces

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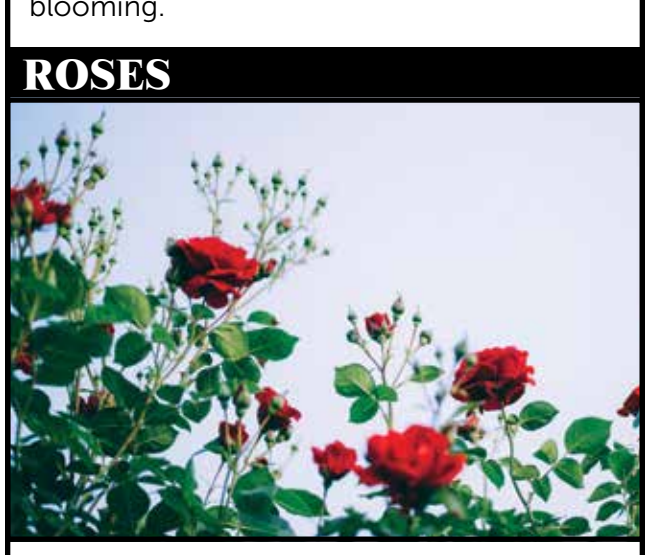
DANDELIONS

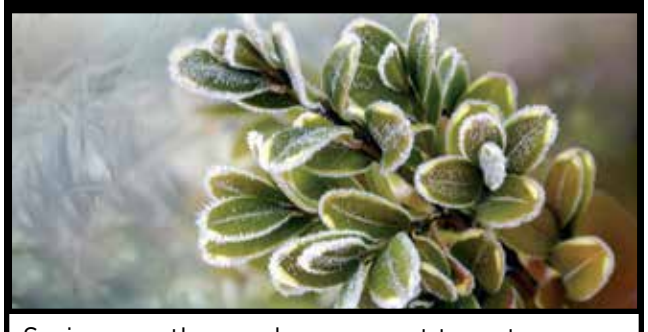
Dandelions are a sure sign of spring. They are an important early food source for the beneficials & pollinators that are returning to our area. If you need to control them, wait until other flowers are blooming.

ROSES



This winter was hard on roses. There are lots of blackened canes this year. Cut back blackened canes into the green portion of the cane. Move mulch away from the plants.

FROST DATE



Spring weather makes us want to get outside, but it can be unpredictable. Snow one day, 60 degrees the next. Remember that the average frost date in this area is May 15.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
https//extentions.wsu.edu/spokane/master-gardener-program/home-lawn-and-garden/

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Gardening And Mental Health

Gardening and strong mental health seemingly go hand-in-hand. A study published in 2018 in the Journal of Clinical Medicine found that exposure to plants and green space, and particularly to gardening, is beneficial to both physical and mental health. Penn State Extension says working with the soil and plants can help relax the mind and have a grounding effect on the gardener. Gardening can help to reduce stress, anxiety and even built-up anger, and may also helps a person connect to the current moment and not be caught up in their mind. Nearly all forms of exercise, gardening included, can lighten your mood and lower levels of stress and anxiety. Routines, such as spending a certain portion of the day weeding or tending to gardening needs, creates a soothing rhythm to ease stress.

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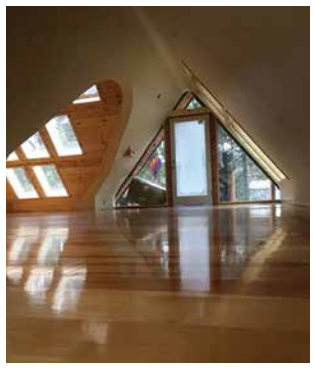

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You've Been Breathing What? Indoor Air Quality After a Long Winter

Here's a thought experiment. Take a house, seal it up tight for five or six months. Run a furnace through it daily. Add some cooking, some cleaning products, maybe a dog or two, possibly a teenager. Prevent most of that air from going anywhere. Now breathe deeply and ask yourself how that air is actually doing.

The answer, for most homes coming out of winter, is "not great." Indoor air quality is one of those topics that sounds like something only people with expensive tastes and air purifier subscriptions worry about, but the EPA has been quietly noting for years that indoor air can be two to five times more polluted than outdoor air. In winter, when homes are sealed and ventilation is minimal, that number can climb higher. Spring is the right time to actually do something about it, and most of the fixes are straightforward enough that you'll wonder why you waited.

The Furnace Has Been Circulating Everything

Your forced air heating system spent the winter doing exactly what it was designed to do, which is move air. Unfortunately it's not particularly selective about what's in that air. Dust, pet dander, mold spores, and whatever else has been living in your ductwork gets distributed evenly throughout your home on a continuous rotation. It's a very democratic system.

Start with the filter, which you've probably been meaning to change for longer than you want to admit. A clogged filter isn't just an efficiency problem, it's also a source. A filter that's full and bypassing air is now shedding particulates back into the system rather than capturing them. Change it, and if you've been using the cheapest fiberglass filters available, consider moving up to a pleated MERV 8 or higher. They cost a little more and they actually do the job they're supposed to do.

If you haven't had your ducts cleaned in several years and you've noticed dust accumulating faster than seems reasonable, it may be worth a professional cleaning. It's not something that needs to happen every year, but it's also not something most people ever do, which means it probably needs to happen at least once.

Your Humidity Levels Are Almost Certainly Wrong

Furnaces are ruthlessly efficient at one thing besides heating, and that's drying out your air. Winter indoor humidity in most forced-air homes runs well below the 30 to 50 percent range that humans and houses actually prefer. Too-dry air irritates airways, makes you more susceptible to viruses, dries out wood trim and flooring, and is generally unpleasant in ways that are easy to attribute to other causes.

If you've been waking up with a dry throat all winter and blaming the cold, test your humidity before you schedule a doctor's appointment. A cheap hygrometer from any hardware store will tell you what you're actually dealing with. A whole-house humidifier attached to your HVAC system is the most effective long-term solution, but even portable room humidifiers make a meaningful difference.

Spring brings the opposite problem in some homes, particularly those with crawl spaces or basements. As outdoor humidity rises and the ground thaws, moisture levels can climb, and humid air plus a poorly ventilated interior is a good environment for mold and dust mites to set up operations. If your home swings from bone dry in winter to stuffy in summer, a dehumidifier in the lower level of the house is worth considering.

Open the Windows. Seriously, Just Open Them.

This sounds too simple to be useful but it is genuinely one of the most effective things you can do for indoor air quality. On a mild spring day with low wind and reasonable outdoor air quality, opening windows on opposite sides of the house for even twenty minutes creates cross-ventilation that flushes accumulated indoor pollutants out and brings fresh air in. Modern homes built or renovated for energy efficiency are particularly prone to air stagnation because they were specifically designed to prevent air from moving in or out.

Continued on page 33

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Continued from page 32

If your home has a heat recovery ventilator or energy recovery ventilator, spring is the time to check that it's functioning and clean its filters. These systems exist precisely to provide controlled ventilation without losing all your conditioned air, and they tend to get ignored until something goes wrong.

What's Living in Your Carpets

Carpets are effective at capturing particulates, which sounds like a good thing and is actually a complicated thing. All that capturing has to go somewhere, and it goes into the carpet, where it accumulates, gets disturbed by foot traffic, and becomes airborne again in a low-level continuous cycle. Dust mites live in carpets and upholstered furniture in numbers that are best not to think about too specifically, feeding on the dead skin cells that humans shed at a rate that would horrify you if it came up at dinner.

Vacuuming with a HEPA-filter equipped vacuum makes a real difference. Steam cleaning carpets in spring removes what vacuuming misses and eliminates a meaningful portion of dust mite populations. If you've been living with a pet all winter, this is not optional. Pet dander in carpet becomes airborne repeatedly and indefinitely until it's actually removed, not just cleaned over the surface.

The Cleaning Products Are Part of the Problem

Volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, are released by a surprisingly long list of common household products. Paints, varnishes, cleaning sprays, air fresheners, scented candles, and synthetic fragrance products all off-gas chemicals into your indoor air. In winter when ventilation is low, these compounds accumulate. The irony of spraying a fragrant cleaner to make your house smell fresh while adding to its chemical load is not lost on people who study this for a living.

This is not a call to throw out everything under your kitchen sink and buy products that cost four times as much and come in brown paper packaging. It's a suggestion to read labels, ventilate when using sprays and cleaners, and consider that the pine-scented air freshener is not actually cleaning the air. It's just adding something to it.

Plants Help, But Not As Much As The Internet Claims

Indoor plants do filter certain VOCs from the air. A 1989 NASA study on this subject became one of the most misquoted pieces of research in home improvement history, leading generations of houseplant enthusiasts to believe that a pothos in the corner was handling their air quality needs. The actual finding was that plants can filter specific compounds under controlled laboratory conditions, and that you would need somewhere between ten and a thousand plants per square foot to replicate those conditions in a real home.

Plants are still worth having. They're good for your mental state, they add humidity to dry winter air, and some filtering is better than none. Just don't let a shelf of succulents substitute for changing your furnace filter and opening a window occasionally.

Spring is the season of fresh starts, and your indoor air quality is a reasonable place to apply that energy. Most of what needs doing costs very little and takes an afternoon. Your lungs have been patient all winter. It's time to return the favor.

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Countertop Rundown

Kitchen renovations continue to top the list of improvements that offer a high rate of return on investment. Buyers pay attention to kitchens, which undoubtedly affects the ROI of kitchen renovations. According to the Journal of Light Construction's "Cost vs. Value Report 2025," a minor kitchen remodel offers an ROI of 113 percent, while a midrange remodel offers an ROI of 51 percent. Replacing a kitchen countertop can help homeowners see improvements to the functionality of their spaces and improve the value of their homes.

According to data from Grand View Research, the U.S. countertops market is projected to reach $35.57 billion in 2026, driven by homeowners who desire high-value renovations over relocating. Those thinking about overhauling their spaces with new countertops can consider the leading materials and how they rank in cost, maintenance and durability.

Engineered quartz
The National Kitchen & Bath Association reports that 78 percent of design professionals expect quartz to be the preferred countertop material over the next several years. Quartz is non-porous, so it will resist stains, scratches and bacteria infiltration without having to be sealed. Unlike natural stone, quartz offers pattern uniformity, which makes it easier to map out seamless transitions. Quartz costs between $50 and $150 per square foot installed.

Granite
Granite still holds a considerable chunk of the countertops market and remains a solid standard for those who value a one-of-a-kind look of natural stone. Granite has exceptional heat resistance and adds significant resale value. However, it requires periodic sealing to maintain its good looks. Costs range from $40 to $190 per square foot.

Porcelain
Porcelain tiles and slabs are projected to become the fastest-growing segment in the ceramic tiles market, according to reports from Yahoo Finance. High-precision printing technology enables porcelain to mimic rare marble and other stone with superior accuracy. Porcelain is even harder than granite and effectively impervious to UV rays. This makes the material a solid choice for outdoor kitchens. Plus, at a cost of $60 to $120 per square foot, it is competitive with other similar materials.

Laminate
Laminate is a budget-friendly option for homeowners at $20 to $80 per square foot, but is not as durable as other materials. Some laminates mimic the look of high-end materials, and they don't require much maintenance.

Countertops affect the look and feel of kitchens and other interior and exterior spaces. Choosing materials comes down to cost, durability and maintenance.

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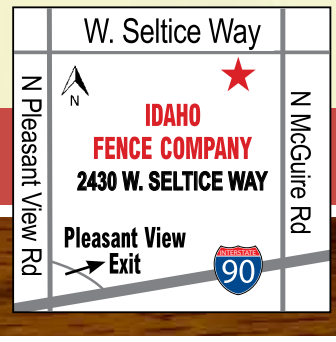

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